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ABSTRACT

The final part of a study of the needs of approximately 500 Alabama vocational educators serving handicapped and disadvantaged students focuses on concerns and problems reported by the educators. Responses are reported by six service areas (agribusiness education, business and office education, distributive education, health occupations education, home economics education, and trade and industrial education). A composite of statements from all areas explains that the most frequently reported problems centered around reading, comprehension, computation, and math skills. Other problems cited included a lack of materials and supplies and a lack of teacher training with special needs students. Recommended are a study of basic skills of special needs students and development of strategies for upgrading those skills. (CL)

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CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS IN WORKING WITH THE DISADVANTAGED AND HANDICAPPED:

An analysis of a Statewide Survey of Vocational Educators in Alabama Who Work With Disadvantaged and Handicapped Students.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Special Needs Coordination Unit: Report #3

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This report was made possible through the cooperation of the Alabama State Director of Vocational Education and his staff, and the hundreds of Vocational Educators who responded to the survey questionnaire.

The comments, analyses, interpretations and recommendations of this study may not necessarily reflect the opinions of the supporting agencies or program.

A note to out-of-state readers: Caution should be used in generalizing the implications from this study to agencies and programs outside the state of Alabama.

SUMMARY

The concerns and problems reported by Vocational Educators in Alabama who work with the disadvantaged and handicapped students were analyzed. The most frequently reported problems centered around reading, comprehending, computational and math skills. Additional areas of concern focused on the lack of materials and supplies needed for projects. Lack of motivation and low self-esteem were two additional problem areas cited. Another group of closely related problems were too many students in a class and not enough time to work with students on an individual basis. The report recommended a study of basic skills (reading and math) of the special needs student, and the development of a teaching strategy and responsibility for upgrading the basic skills needed to be successful in vocational education programs.

INTRODUCTION

The descriptive elements of this study were detailed in Report #1 on Training Needs. Please refer to this publication for procedural information.

A copy of the survey questionnaire used in this study is available in Appendix A.

The following sections in this study have been referenced for reader usability.

Please note that for each service area analysis with regards to problems and concerns that a notation proceeds each statement (N = 1,2,3,...). This notation represents the number of responses that were reported for that particular statement.

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The following statements are based on a response to the question: "What problems have you encountered in working with either of the following special needs students:

Handicapped
Disadvantaged

ANALYSIS

In the original questionnaire the vocational teachers were asked to identify problems in working with the disadvantaged, and problems in working with the handicapped. Although a section of the questionnaire was provided for a response to each of these special needs categories, in several responses the statements overlapped both categories.

The questionnaire was analyzed by providing a separate category of responses for the disadvantaged, the handicapped, and a category of responses that applied to both handicapped and disadvantaged students. This procedure for analyzing the responses was a logistic one, but a caution should be noted that based on the overlap of the responses the categories may not be mutually exclusive.

PROBLEMS
AGRIBUSINESS EDUCATION

Disadvantaged

N=9 The most frequently cited problem for the disadvantaged was the lack of supplies, materials and equipment to do projects.

N=6 In this group of statements the teachers reported poor reading levels as a significant problem. "Probably the major problem is their inability to read with understanding. This also hinders their understanding of what I want them to do." "They can't communicate, nor do they understand directions. We need specific teaching materials for these students."

N=4 Too many in a class was identified by several teachers as a problem. There was an indication in the responses that the administration was pushing for a maximum number of students in these classes -- the same as in any other class.

N=4 The inability to devote enough time to these students was cited as a problem. This problem links directly to the previously cited problem of "too large a class" which would preclude much individualized work with the special needs student.

N=3 The difficulty in getting across an appreciation and understanding of ethical values was cited as a problem with the special needs student.

N=3 The lack of resources in the form of teaching material at the students level was cited as a basic problem. More pictures and fewer words in the materials was advocated.

PROBLEMS

BUSINESS AND OFFICE EDUCATION

Disadvantaged

N=18 The most frequently reported problem related to the basic skills of reading and math. Typical responses in this category include:

> "I do not know how to cope with the low reading level and poor communication skills."
>
> "Cannot read well enough to complete assignments, lack of basic skills in math."
>
> "Reading level poor; math skills poor. Student unable to read and communicate effectively."

N=14 Motivation was identified as a critical problem area. The statements in this category, however, reflected not only the student lack of motivation, but also the teacher's lack of sophistication in how to motivate the student. Typical statements in this category include:

> "My limited motivational techniques for work with the disadvantaged: Being creative enough to come up with a variety of motivational techniques and teaching methods."
>
> "These students seem to have a failure syndrome. They do not put forth their best effort."
>
> "Lack of initiative to apply themselves to the learning situation."

N=9 Excessive absences or poor attendance was identified as a problem area.

N=7 Lack of student resource material, including their inability to meet financial assessments and to pay for resource material was identified as a problem area.

N=4 Hygiene problems and personal appearance were reflected as problems in the teacher statements.

N=4 Low self-esteem and lack of confidence was identified as a problem. It should be noted that the statements in this category differed from the previously identified category of 'lack of motivation'.

N=4 Lack of time both from the standpoint of instructor time and the time it takes a student to complete the assignments was reported as a problem area.

The following problem statements were reported only once with regard to the disadvantaged:

"Need transportation to a job."

"Can't help students find a job during and after completion of course."

"Not enough money (in school program) to purchase instructional materials. The special needs students are too far below the level of other students to learn effectively with the same materials and under the same circumstances as regular program students."

Handicapped

N=6 Placing the student in a job after training was identified as a problem area for handicapped students.

The following problem statements were reported only once with regard to the handicapped student:

"Not readily accepted by peers or employers."

"Feeling of insecurity--less than the best."

"Student can't get on or off bus or carry own books."

Handicapped and Disadvantaged

N=3 Identification of handicapped and disadvantaged students was reported as a problem. In general the statements reflected a lack of information on the student.

PROBLEMS
DISTRIBUTIVE EDUCATION

Disadvantaged

N=22 The most frequently reported problem area for this group was identified as poor reading, spelling, and writing. This overall communication problem makes it difficult for these students to follow a general curriculum or to perform adequately. One teacher noted: "Workshops are needed to teach us how to teach these students to read! Also how to communicate with these kids based on their home environment."

N=5 This category included statements regarding a lack of motivation or a difficulty in motivating the disadvantaged student.

N=1 One statement noted that a significant problem existed in trying to establish moral and ethical standards with the disadvantaged.

Handicapped

Each of the following statements were reported only once with regard to the handicapped:

Don't know where to get the resources to help them.

How do you work with hyperactive children?

Architectural barriers are a problem. Stairs in and out of classroom make it difficult for the non-ambulatory student.

Combined Handicapped and Disadvantaged

N=2 The lack of individualized learning materials creates a problem for the teacher.

N=2 The social adjustment problems of the handicapped and disadvantaged students makes it difficult for these students to relate to the future.

PROBLEMS
HEALTH OCCUPATIONS EDUCATION

Disadvantaged

N=14 The lack of reading skills, the inability to write a sentence and to follow instructions were identified as a significant problem for the disadvantaged student. One teacher noted that, "The low reading level makes it hard to try to have independent individualized study. I'm not trained to teach reading and do not have materials to teach reading."

N=6 Lack of motivation and low self-esteem were cited as significant problems of the special needs students. Comments such as: "Does not show much interest in classroom work", "Very short attention span", "Doesn't seem to want to learn", "No initiative", "Lacks an attitude of success", "Low self-esteem", "Lack of pride", and "Lack of trust in the school system", were characteristic of the teachers' responses.

N=5 A lack of outside-the-school materials was reported as a barrier to effective teaching. Frequently the disadvantaged student did not have outside resource material such as newspapers, pencils, tablets, etc., available to prepare his assignment adequately.

N=3 A value system that was not conducive to a vocational career was considered a problem by several teachers.

Handicapped and Disadvantaged

N=3 Transportation problems were cited by some teachers for both the handicapped and the disadvantaged students.

PROBLEMS

HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION

Disadvantaged

N=22 Lack of materials and resources was identified as the most significant problem in working with the disadvantaged. The majority of statements in this category reflected the students lack of financial resources to bring the necessary materials to class in order to work on projects. Several of the typical teacher responses in this category are listed for clarification:

> "The main problem in my class is that these students do not have money to purchase fabrics or material for their sewing projects."
>
> "How do you cope with the economic disadvantaged in class when the affluent students provide their own materials needed for a project--there is an emotional strain on the student."
>
> "Don't even have pencils."
>
> "Do not have material in home necessary for class like daily papers, magazines, set of measuring utensils."
>
> "Often aren't able to pay dues and have failed two or more grades."

N=20 Poor reading skills was identified as a critical problem with the disadvantaged. The following are some of the typical teacher comments in this area:

> "Cannot follow verbal or written instructions."
>
> "Slow reading and comprehending skills."
>
> "No ability to fully understand work given to them. Can't comprehend reading assignments, no faith in themselves and what they can do. Afraid to express themselves openly."
>
> "Poor reading and writing skills."

N=12 Lack of interest and lack of motivation for work or education was identified as a problem area in working with the disadvantaged.

N=9 Two related factors were identified in this category as a problem in teaching the disadvantaged: Note enough time, and

classes that were too large in number. In general, the statements reflected the need for smaller classes if more individualized attention were to be "given" to the student.

N=9 Need help in defining who is disadvantaged was reported as a problem. Some comments in this category included:

> "Need an official definition from the state department to better classify and work with these students."
>
> "Need background information about the student--not just grades. Need to know something about home relations."

N=9 The lack of learning materials, and reading materials at the students level, was identified as a problem area.

N=6 The student's lack of self-confidence was reported as a problem area. It should be noted that the statements in this category differed from the previously cited category of "lack of interest and lack of motivation." The emphasis in the statements in this grouping focused on the student's inability to "open up" in class.

N=5 The student's home environment was identified as a problem area. How to work closer with parents; how to work with students from broken homes; how to develop a respect for the individual and a value for work in the home environment, were typical problems identified.

N=4 Personal hygiene was reported as a problem area. Cleanliness, grooming, and health care were some of the specific references to personal hygiene problems.

Handicapped

N=10 Not enough time and too many students in a class was identified as a critical problem in working with the handicapped. A few typical statements in this category include:

> "Not enough time to adequately instruct both the special needs and the regular student in the same class."
>
> "Too many in one class when integrated. I don't have enough time to work with them."

N=6 Architectural barriers have been cited as a problem in working with the handicapped. Included here are problems with high counter tops for wheelchair students and equipment that has not been modified for use by the handicapped.

N=5 Communication skills with the deaf had been cited as a problem area.

N=3 The short attention span of the EMR, and the lack of materials for teaching this student, was reported as a problem.

The following statements were reported only once as a problem:

> "Lack of motivation."
>
> "Parental overprotection. Parents who won't let the individual do anything on his own."
>
> "No way to evaluate these students when they are placed in a regular class."
>
> "Negative attitudes."
>
> "Don't know what performance to expect from a mentally retarded student."
>
> "Need information to help explain and understand behavioral problems."

Handicapped and Disadvantaged

N=9 Lack of teacher training to work with the special needs student was reported as a problem area. Typical comments include:

> "I have no teaching know how for these special students. I need specific ideas, resources, and equipment geared to their needs."
>
> "I have never received training on how to work with these students. Most information I have received is with theory or how to fill in reports."

PROBLEMS

TRADE AND INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION

Disadvantaged

N=9 The most frequently reported problem in working with the disadvantaged centered on basic skill deficiencies in reading, math, and communication skills. One teacher statement seemed to summarize this category: "Too much catch-up work in reading and math. No time to teach technical skills which have math and reading as a basis."

N=5 Lack of time and too many students in a class are two related problems that were identified by the teachers.

N=5 Students' inability to purchase necessary tools and material to complete a project was viewed as a problem. One teacher raised a critical question: "Can we penalize the student because he does not have the resources for needed materials?"

The following problem statements were reported only once for the disadvantaged.

> "Problems in placing them after they are trained."
>
> "Very difficult to construct a special program for disadvantaged and continue with regular program at the same time."

Handicapped

N=6 Not enough time to work with these students individually and too many in a class was reported as a problem in working with the handicapped. The time concern was also reflected in the students' inability to complete the coursework in the time allowed.

N=2 Equipment problem from an architectural barrier standpoint was identified as a problem. In particular, a reference was made to the need for drafting tables with adjustable heights.

Handicapped and Disadvantaged

N=4 In both areas of handicapped and disadvantaged specific reference was made to the need for more machines and tools.

CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS:

A COMPOSITE OF STATEMENTS FROM ALL SERVICE AREAS

The analysis of the composite of all the statements may be misleading because of a disproportionate number of responses from among the various service areas. The trend for the priorities of the problems was influenced by the areas with the largest number of responses. For this reason the concern should not be focused on what are the priority problems, but rather on what is the pattern of the problems encountered.

Problems in working with the Disadvantaged:

The most frequently reported problems in this category centered on deficiencies in reading, comprehending, computational and math skills. One teacher summarized the problem by reporting: "Too much catch-up work in reading and math. No time to teach technical skills which have math and reading as a basis."

Another major problem focused on the lack of materials and supplies. The majority of statements in this grouping reflected the student's lack of financial resources to bring the necessary materials (cloth, tools and related) to class in order to work on projects.

Another major response area centered on lack of motivation, low self-esteem and related phenomenon. The statements in this category reflected not only the student's lack of motivation but also the teacher's lack of sophistication in motivational

technology.

Related phenomenon in this grouping were excessive class absences, poor attendance and low interest level.

Another significant grouping of responses focused on two interrelated problems: Not enough time, and classes that were too large in number. The lack of time was reported both from the standpoint of the instructor, as time to work with the special needs of the students, and the length of time it takes a student to complete the necessary assignment.

Too many students in a class is a problem that relates directly to the amount of time available to work with each student.

The following problem areas were reported less frequently than the previous four mentioned areas.

A problem in identifying who is a disadvantaged student was cited. A need in this area was for an official definition to better classify and work with these students, and for background information on these students.

The student's home environment was identified as a problem area. Included here were the need to work closer with parents, and how to work with students from broken homes.

The lack of a value system by many of the disadvantaged students was cited as a problem area. Here specifically was mentioned the difficulty in getting across an appreciation and understanding of moral and ethical values and standards.

Personal hygiene was also noted as a problem area.

Problems in working with the Handicapped:

The most significant problems noted in working with the handicapped included: Not enough time to work with the students; too many students in a class; architectural barriers; communication problems, in particular with the deaf students, and the short attention spans of the slow learner; and placing the student in a job after training.

Additional problems noted in working with the handicapped included: Parental overprotection; not knowing what performanc- to expect from the student; not knowing where to get resources; and problems related to a specific handicapping condition, like, "How to work with hyperactive children?"

Problems common to working with both Handicapped and Disadvantaged Students:

The following problem areas were reported for working with both Handicapped and Disadvantaged students:

Lack of teacher training to work with special needs students.

Transportation problems, particularly in regard to getting additional transportation for field trips.

Lack of individualized learning materials.

Social adjustment problems of the handicapped and disadvantaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As previously noted the procedure used in this analysis may have created an artificial separation of the problems experienced by the teacher between the special needs groupings for the handicapped and disadvantaged.

In reality, the problems encountered in one grouping are most likely also common to the other grouping.

A word about the term "Problems":

The term "Problems" was used in the questionnaire and used throughout the analysis. This term frequently has a negative connotation and caution must be used in interpreting the implications of the statements.

A problem is a reflection of a deficiency in programming, resources, preparation, the individual student or the teacher himself. The intent of this analysis was not simply to identify problems, but to relate the problems to original deficiencies. Once the original deficiencies are pinpointed, remediation or the resolution of the problem areas is simplified.

An overall review of the problems cited in working with handicapped and disadvantaged students would indicate that the recommendations noted in the "Training" and the "Resources" report would help to significantly reduce the problems reported. Specifically in these two areas a reference is made to teacher training with regard to resource availability and utilization, teaching motivational technology and teaching communication skills.

There are however, a number of problem areas cited that cannot be resolved in the long run through training and resources. Too many students in a class is a scheduling and manpower problem. This in turn is a problem related to availability of financial resources or their appropriate distribution.

Teaching reading and math skills is a problem area that deserves critical attention. Although all educators are involved in teaching reading and math, but once it becomes a priority concern for the vocational instructor, his effectiveness as a vocational instructor is significantly diminished.

It is recommended that a study be conducted with regard to the basic skills of the special needs student in reading and math, and to identify in this study necessary instruction, technology, and responsibilities for providing the basic reading and math skills needed, long before the student reaches a secondary program in vocational education.

In addition, it is recommended that the integration of reading and math materials related to vocational education programs be introduced into the reading and math instructional activities. Resources to develop reading and math related exercises in the form of curricula should be made available, and the variety of curricula already developed by other programs in this area should be explored and field tested in the classrooms.